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SUBJECT: Slovakia Political Roundup January 23-31, 2004

Ref: Bratislava 34

12 Candidates File in Presidential Race

1. By the January 30 deadline, there were 12 presidential candidates, listed here in order of preference among potential voters in the most recent poll: Eduard Kukan, Vladimir Meciar, Rudolf Schuster, Ivan Gasparovic, Lubo Roman, Martin Butora, Frantisek Miklosko, Jan Kralik, Jozef Kalman, Stanislav Bernat, Jozef Sestak, and Julius Kubik. Meciar and Schuster waited until the last day to declare. Schuster explained to media, "it would be insincere of me to disrespect the voices of those who called on me to run for re-election." Meciar's statement was, "If the presidential elections were ultimately decided based on the theory of a lesser evil, I would be the president." Details about each candidate appeared in reftel.

Convictions for Corruption Increase

2. According to Ministry of Justice and General Prosecutor's Office statistics, convictions under existing anti-corruption laws have increased significantly in 2003. In 2002, 16 individuals were sentenced for corruption and 334 for misuse of public authority. In the first half of 2003, 28 people were sentenced for corruption (out of 87 investigated by the police, 51 were accused), and 251 individuals were sentenced for misuse of public authority (of 420 investigated, 357 were accused). Surveys show Slovaks are concerned about corruption, but in practice corruption is still underreported. Nonetheless, more cases are coming to light. Members of the anti-corruption unit caught an Army Lieutenant Colonel accepting a \$500 bribe from an officer to prolong the officer's contract in Eritrea. Contracts in foreign countries are attractive and competitive because salaries are significantly higher. A few days later, a Bratislava gynecologist was caught taking SKK 7,000 (\$213) after threatening to drop a patient from his roster if he was not paid the money.

Trouble Festers in Slovak National Party

3. Several events have kept the Slovak National Party in the headlines recently. Peter Sulovsky and Zilina mayor Jan Slota both continue to claim chairmanship of the party. Slota suggested a nationalist "megacongress" to determine who should be chairman. On January 20, a bomb exploded beneath Sulovsky's car. Earlier in the month, Anna Malikova, who claims deputy chairmanship of the party under Slota, complained loudly and publicly about being barred from the SNS office in Bratislava by guards loyal to Sulovsky. Recent comments by Slota that a Roma activist should be expelled from the country and that the police treat Roma too well explain why human rights observers are quite satisfied with the nationalists' internal bickering.

SDKU Sues Kalinak for Releasing "Skupinka" Names

4. SDKU has filed a lawsuit against Smer deputy Robert Kalinak for releasing the names last summer of the "skupinka" PM Dzurinda alleged was destabilizing the state, saying he got the list from a source close to the PM. SDKU wants an apology and SKK 500,000 (\$15,244) in damages. Kalinak counters that it has since become clear that he made no mistake.

Figel Will Be Slovakia's Eurocommissioner

5. During the Coalition Council meeting on January 27, former EU negotiator Jan Figel was selected to be Slovakia's first European Commissioner. Figel, 43, is a member of the Christian Democrat Movement (KDH), chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Parliament, and was State Secretary of the MFA from 1998 to 2002 between his Parliament terms. During his 1992-1998 term as MP, he also held two positions in the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

ABA-CEELI Closes After Successful Decade

16. The American Bar Association's Central and East European Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI), the last SEED program in Slovakia, closed January 27 with a ceremony featuring DCM as well as Justice Minister Daniel Lipsic, a former CEELI staff member. The program also held final roundtables on public procurement and on judicial reform. Judges at the roundtable praised the electronic court system. They noted that that the new system streamlines court administration, but there is still work needed to change the habits of judges and clerks.

Two Constitutional Revisions Under Consideration

17. Two constitutional amendments are advancing through Parliament despite government opposition. One bill would require ministers to seek, and hew to, Parliament's explicit direction on all matters under discussion within the EU, which the GOS finds impractical. The other would extend MPs' immunity from prosecution for statements made in Parliament.
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